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A plan of civic improvement for the city of
Oakland, California / by Charles Mulford
Robinson. 1906.

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A Plan of Civic Improvement for the City of Oakland, California

By CHARLES MULFORD ROBINSON

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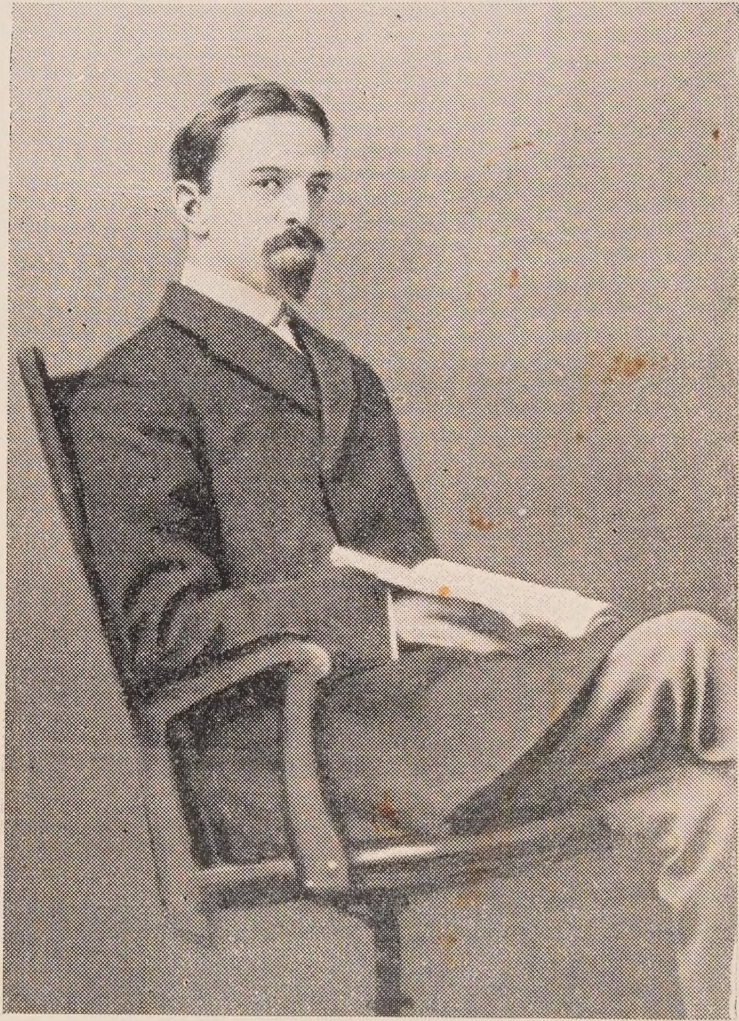
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Chas W Street .

81 0035



CHARLES MULFORD ROBINSON

*To the Hon. Frank K. Mott, Mayor, and to the Honorable the
City Council, Oakland, California—*

Gentlemen: You have instructed me to examine the city of Oakland with a view to suggesting such changes as may add to its attractiveness and enhance its civic beauty.

Since concluding the investigations made in response to this request, the city of San Francisco has suffered from such a calamity that in the first rush of sympathy it has seemed a heartless and inappropriate act to plan for the pleasures and beauty of a neighboring community. But in the larger view, in the light of calm consideration rather than of emotion, this must appear to be a wise procedure. The citizens of San Francisco themselves are planning for a greater city; and however necessary for you such forethought may before have seemed, the recent events has added vastly to its importance. Oakland can hardly fail now to increase even more rapidly than heretofore in population and in business. To increasing extent it must become more than the dormitory of San Francisco, while becoming that also with more than former emphasis.

You have to plan for a great city, and for a population that to a peculiar extent will need parks and pleasure grounds; and if these reservations are not chosen now, the cost and general difficulties of securing them will grow much more rapidly than will your ability to meet them. What is not planned for at this propitiously early date may never be obtained. Indeed, there are few cities that, with a power to prepare for the future, are given the opportunity to foresee it with such clearness as it may now be confidently predicted here. Nor is it heartless thus to consider your own future. The future Oakland will certainly be the home of many of those who have recently suffered in San Francisco. It can scarcely be doubted that in anticipating that you are as certainly planning for the pleasure and comfort of thousands of them as for the happiness and well-being of yourselves.

But before drawing a picture of the Oakland you ought to make, we must

consider the Oakland that is. It were idle to contemplate revolutionary schemes. In order that the city may prosper while it grows there is needed, not a new Oakland, but a developed Oakland. I conceive it my duty to study what can be made out of Oakland, not how it might be made over. And let me say here that I have found the pursuit of these investigations a most inspiring and pleasant task, not alone because of the city's lovely natural setting and the need that advantage be taken of this while time remains, but because of the administration's tireless and cordial co-operation in the work and of the confident and generous backing by the press.

CITY BUILDING A SCIENCE.

Nor shall we be dealing with only esthetic needs. Modern city building is a science quite as much as art. It has to do also with social, moral, commercial and industrial problems, for the beautifying of a city is not artistically done and, therefore not well done, unless it incidentally helps to solve such questions just as these problems have not been solved properly until their solutions incidentally add to the beauty of the city. For beauty is not an ornament to be stuck on. Its essence lies in its structural utility. We must consider, therefore, not merely the superficial beauty of the city, but the convenience of its traffic, the social and economic as certainly as the topographical divisions of the urban territory; the items of fire protection and of hygienic requirements, of property values; the future needs as well as the present, and the consistency of the whole plan as well as excellence of details. I shall go into no discussion of all this, as it would take a volume; but, underlying every recommendation, I can assure you, there will have been consideration of these many factors. You have me on record, as far as the theories go, in my books and more comprehen-

sively there than I could hope to be in every application to specific cases, as different cities ask advice. I only want to say here that the incidental, but very vital, considerations have not been forgotten; and that, in a necessary handling of the subjects one by one, the effect of the whole has in no case been overlooked. My findings and recommendations are, concretely, as follows:

CONDITIONS NOW IN THE CITY OF OAKLAND.

In approach to Oakland from the bay, one sees a city stretching far along the waterfront and back over the flat plain, until the houses begin to climb the foothills. These, lying in rolling terraces beyond, promise views of rare majesty and beauty. The air at every season is soft and mild, the skies are blue, even often when fog hides the bay's other shore and the homes are separate houses, embowered in roses and wisteria and rising from gardens of lilies. What a place this appears, naturally and sociologically, for parks!

And yet to their glorious waterfront on one of the most beautiful bays of the world the people of Oakland have no access. There is not a spot on all the long bay and estuary frontage where they are free to watch the ceaseless panorama of the shipping. And on those hills, with their noble views and romantic glens there are no free pleasure grounds to which they have inalienable right; no walks and drives save the lines of direct travel; no seats; no lovely site, except the highways, which private ownership may not if it pleases fence off from public trespass, or use for the erection of signs that with hideous commonplaceness would unescapably dominate the town.

BAD VIEW OF THE CITY.

Or one may come into Oakland, as most travelers for the first time do, by the railroad. Then the view of this city of beautiful situation is a bare, marshy plain on the one side, while on the other is the bay. Here, amid desolate and uninviting surroundings, is the station.

But from the top of the tall building of the Union Savings Bank there is

to be had a third and more encouraging and satisfactory view of Oakland. Since the fine natural topography is again plainly visible, and one can see the long straight streets, and the arterial diagonal thoroughfares converging at the center with quite the aspect of a Paris, and one is gratified to note that at this point there is a little public reservation and that the City Hall is here located. Not only, then, for its official significance, but because of its central position, this point needs careful development.

So the larger problems of Oakland, from the esthetic standpoint, readily group themselves. We have a large and fast growing city which is, above every other characteristic, a city of homes, a city, that is, where people not merely work, but live; where children grow up, where is the family life and where the family pleasures ought to be; a city ideally located for parks and pleasure-grounds; and one where the climatic conditions invite the people out of doors at all times of the year. Let us consider, then, what can be done to satisfy Oakland's esthetic needs on practicable lines of development.

GREAT PARK IS ONE OF PRIMARY NEEDS.

In a city such as Oakland an obvious requirement is a considerable park acreage that shall satisfy the community's desire for pleasure out of doors. To do this the parks, or at least one of them, must be not only of large size, but readily accessible and the park possessions must present, in their entirety, a variety of attractions to suit the varied tastes of the community's members. There should be opportunity for driving, for walking, and if possible for boating; there should be places for picnics, for meditation and for games; the landscape work should include, if feasible, both the natural and the artificial, or formal styles; and it would be desirable to have the scenery comprise at once the picturesque and the rugged, the pastoral and the romantic, the closed-in picture and the extended view, so that all the various prejudices of good taste may be gratified, and the community as a whole take pleasure in the scenery publicly possessed. If these varied attractions cannot be included

in one park, it will be well to have a series of public reservations of which each unit shall represent a distinct type and serve a distinct function. But if they can be brought together in a single holding that shall be sufficiently central there will obviously be a gain in economy of administration and in largeness of effect.

From the top of the bank building, one overlooks a sea of houses that stretches far except in one direction. This is the northeast, where near at hand is Lake Merritt, bare bluffs on its eastern side, a little plot of oaks on the northern, while almost to its further end the hills stretch down in all their natural beauty, making a broad gore into the city, a natural park site, marvelously preserved from the builders' hands, and convenient of access.

SITE ABOUT LAKE.

The opportunity is too evident to have been overlooked. The city has acquired some land around the lake and is negotiating for more, and for some of the distance a boulevard is already under construction, while the reclaimed land between the lake and Eighth street, an eyesore in its present barren state, and one very centrally located, is to be transformed into a garden spot that shall include half screened by bordering shrubs, convenient sites for games, such as baseball and tennis.

This makes a good start for a park, and there is no need only to point out the area's further utilization. Boating should be encouraged on the lake, the city erecting an artistic boathouse on the Twelfth street margin and letting the concession. On one of the other shores, more remote from the tide of business, there should be a bandstand, that the people of Oakland may have among their other pleasures the enjoyment of music heard at evening over the water. In the city of Providence, R. I., this is one of the great features at Roger Williams Park, where thousands upon thousands of people go out on the lake on summer evenings to listen to the music. A requirement that at night each boat shall carry a lantern will not only make for increased safety, but will add much to the picturesqueness of the spectacle, creating a fairyland scene.

CHANCE FOR A BOULEVARD.

The boulevard may be properly carried around the lake, skirting the shore as fast as the land can be secured, except at Adams Point. This, with its grove of oaks, is much too fine a pleasure and picnic ground to be cut into by a drive, and the boulevard will properly take the line of Grand Avenue, as now. Adams Point the city must certainly obtain.

The boulevard on the east side of the lake, as planned and partially built, can be improved, I think, by some modifications in design. Its needlessly great width is unpleasant, and incidentally adds large expense for maintenance to the glare and dust and loneliness of the road. I therefore recommend that the driveway be narrowed by the insertion of a bridle-path, separated from the road by trees and shrubs. This, with further connections beyond, to which I shall later refer, would be here a welcome and appropriate feature and could be easily maintained. On the portions of the east shore boulevard that are yet unbuilt the wide strip permits a change of lines that, by small detours and easy curves, will take away the appearance of railroad directness—which is not desirable on a park drive where people go to spend time, not to save it. Between the road and water there should be some planting, and a broad gravel walk next to the shore line will make a popular promenade while defending the turf and shrubs from the salt spray.

Directly to the east of the boulevard, in some cases rising from the drive in sheer bluffs, are bare hills. Low as they are, these command a view of city and lake, and from the lowlands frame the park picture on this side. The city should add them to its holdings. They can be beautified by planting, and whatever beauty is given to them will, from the conspicuousness of the site, spread its influence far, doing much more than simply adorn the hill. Trails can be made up on them that will offer easy walks to advantageous view points, and there reservation will secure, as far as they extend the beauty of the park boundaries, and thus will protect the park view. Indeed, it is a good general rule, in the acquisition of park areas, to put the boundary just beyond the landscape's natural frame where-

ever this is possible, and elsewhere to conceal it with heavy irregular planting, in order that no sharply defining line may be seen and that the park may seem to have that indefiniteness of extent which cannot fail, of itself, to be pleasing to the cramped dwellers in a city.

NEED HILL SLOPE.

It has been proposed to include in this park around Lake Merritt the low, filled in land at the head of the lake between Pleasant Valley road and Lake Shore avenue. There can here be created an attractive garden; and for the same reasons that it would be well to reserve the bluffs east of the lake. I would be glad to see brought into the city's holdings the hill slope that marks the further limit of this tract. With its greater distance from town this is not quite so essential as the bluffs, and if there could be assurance that it would have an artistic development, with roads that curved with the contour of the hill, with high class and attractive residences and ample gardens, there would be little need for the city to buy it.

But such assurance is impossible, since individual idiosyncracies may be responsible for a most hideous house on the best of lots and even at large cost. The only way of making certain that the park frame on this side will never be ruined is to protect it by purchase. And it is at least as worth while to frame adequately the landscape picture of the public parks as to frame adequately a painting.

I may note that with the city's purchases extended far enough along these hills beside the Pleasant Valley road there would be furnished an admirable site for convenient public golf links, the tract so performing what may be called a utilitarian, or physical, function as well as an esthetic, and putting to use a portion of the park that otherwise would be little used. It may be added, however, that this park reservation is so conspicuously placed that its mere beauty must be a vital factor in the general appearance of the city, and that it is so near to closely built up sections that unless its natural topographical boundaries are safeguarded they certainly will be built upon.

DREDGING THE LAKE.

In the lake itself it will be necessary to do some dredging, and from the dredgings one or two small islands can be created. These, however, should be near the shore, that the broad expanse of water may be little broken, as that is one of the best features of the lake. Near shore, too, and connected by artistic bridges, the islands will make very attractive additions to the shore parking.

Lake Merritt Park, to designate it by its most prominent feature, is thus fairly outlined as to extent (as now suggested), development and use. It will be a most attractive and serviceable little park; but it is by no means sufficient to satisfy the requirements of the city.

Reaching the Lake Merritt tract near its northeastern corner is romantic Indian gulch, with a parklike road over-hung by great trees, following the stream far on its further side. I understand that some years ago there was a project before the people for the purchase of this gulch and road, with the land between and enough on either side to frame properly the picture, the whole strip, known as the Sather tract, amounting in its considerable length to some 300 acres.

I know nothing about the reasonableness or otherwise of the proposed price, but I am sure that in not securing this land in some way or other there was made a mistake. It is so nearly a park now, thanks to the taste with which the road was laid out and to the preservation of the scenery's natural charm, that there will be need of very little expenditure beyond that required for the purchase of the land. And it will offer one of the most picturesque and romantic walks and drives that can be found near any large city or my acquaintance in this or other countries. Considering its availability—in convenience of access, in ease of grade, in opportunities for pleasant return by another route, in suitability of extent—I think, in fact, of no park drive of similar nature to which it is clearly second; and as an adequate municipal park system necessarily includes provision for driving and for those who like beautiful walks, I must urge the people of Oakland to obtain this property. That it will fit in so well with the proposed Lake Merritt Park, offering a delightful ob-

jective to the suggested bridlepath on the east shore boulevard, and to the boulevard itself, is an added reason for obtaining it—as is the possibility of its service as a connecting link in making convenient and beautiful circular drives, or park ways.

INDIAN GULCH ROAD.

The Indian Gulch road already connects at its upper end with Dimond canyon, and the road through the latter, with its contiguous land—beautiful in scenery and a popular picnic and walking tract even now—should be acquired by the city, that the return route may be worthy of the going, and that the east, or Brooklyn, section of Oakland may have as convenient and lovely a park approach and drive as will the central. In fact, as in the case of the Lake Merritt tract, this will be something more than an approach, or avenue of exit. It will be in itself and in its use a park. Of the town or street connections of the Dimond canyon road I shall speak hereafter.

If the loop drive thus offered by Indian gulch and Dimond canyon has any esthetic fault it is that for nearly the whole distance it is too shut in to offer long views. Although the grade of both roads rises steadily, until at about their point of meeting a considerable elevation has been reached there is very little chance to enjoy the superb prospect of cities, bay, hills and islands that is spread out below the vantage points at Oakland's back. The little glimpses that are offered from the road are tantalizing in their reminder of what one misses even while it is realized that the picturesqueness of gulch and canyon is in itself complete. Hence I recommend that in the acquirement of the Indian gulch tract enough land be added to the strip originally considered to include in it Clinton mound, so that by connecting this part of Excelsior avenue with the park roads, and making a park drive of it, with an outlook turnabout at the summit and a short-cut connection with Lake Merritt's east shore boulevard via Bay avenue, there may be offered, for those who desire it, a circuit that will combine roads at high and low levels, views shut in and extended, picturesqueness and inspiration. This knoll has very close street connections, so that it

would have great park value locally as well as in the system.

It would open connections with the top of the bluff east of Lake Merritt, the acquirement of which has been proposed, so adding to the latter's usefulness; and it is the only high ground in immediate proximity to the city that has not been now lost to the community by building. The Bella Vista tract on the one side and the Oakland Heights on the other, both fully built up with high-class residences, are good examples of the popular appreciation of the value of such a view and enjoyment of it, and of the danger in delay.

WESTERN PART OF CITY.

As to the western section of Oakland, with its many thousand homes, there is need, if these park areas are to serve the city at large, having more than neighborhood value, that it, too, shall have connection with them. The contemplated expenditure, fairly demands that the proposed park and parkways shall perform so large a service. Happily, the conditions are remarkably favorable.

The city administration has wisely planned, with the co-operation of property-owners, to construct a so-called boulevard along Cemetery creek, from Harrison boulevard, connecting with Lake Merritt park and boulevard, up nearly to Moraga or Thorn road. Eventually the improvement must reach quite to this road. With the necessarily narrow winding driveway, and the wild planting, the Cemetery creek drive will be more accurately, and properly, a parkway than a boulevard, and tapping a large and important section of the city it will much extend the invitation and accessibility of the Lake Merritt Park and of the parks and drives beyond. That it be strictly developed as a parkway, rather on the model of Boston's Fenway, than as a boulevard, and to the denial of the ideals of breadth and rigidity, is most important. Then it should be rechristened. Its old name, Glen Echo, is very much to be preferred.

SHOULD BE PARK LINK.

The new drive, however, should perform a larger function than has been yet suggested. It should not only be a

park approach, but a park link. The Thorn road, leading up to Piedmont Heights, is in itself a beautiful drive. To be sure, the cemetery is at one side; but at an increasing distance from the road and shut off from it by the tall and stately eucalyptus and finally by a depression that becomes almost a ravine, and the planting can, if desired, be made yet thicker. Meanwhile attention is distracted from the cemetery by the views on the other side, the road clinging to the side of the hill as it climbs at easy grade. This road, by designation as a park road and ultimately by some further planting, ought to be made an extension, or perhaps more strictly the goal at this end, of Glen Echo drive. Reaching Piedmont Heights by its means, connection can then be made by an existing street, well paved and attractively built up, with Piedmont Park, or back and around the contour of the hill with Indian gulch and the Dimond canyon roads. The latter connection should be made, as it easily can be, via the town side of the hill, instead of behind it as at present, so that the noble view may be enjoyed. Thus Indian gulch will have its loop to the west side as well as to the east, or a grand outside circuit, via Dimond canyon and Thorn road, may be made; and east and west sides will have parkway connection without the necessity of going through the city.

There is opened thus an astonishing opportunity for the creation of a country park in unusual proximity to the city, and with approaches from all sections. The opportunity is too good to ignore. Beginning with the acquisition of Piedmont Park—since it is ready made—the city should if possible screw up its park enthusiasm and its confidence in the future to the point of acquiring also the open tract between Piedmont Park and the Indian gulch tract boundary. These takings would give point to the extended pleasant valley boulevard, and would create a magnificent country park—of which the Indian gulch road would be only a side drive, and to which Thorn and Dimond canyon roads would be approaches—that would thrust its way, in a beautiful great gore, almost to the center of the city, the lake and the playground beyond being its southern

terminus. Then Oakland, with a park to be proud of, would thereby take high place among cities and its attractiveness to home-builders would be enormously increased.

IN REACH OF OAKLAND.

Nor would the city be doing more than it ought to do, with such an opportunity, with its large and destined to be larger population of householders, and with the constancy of its out-of-doors weather. The acquisition of all except the lands between the proposed line of the Sather tract and Piedmont Park is the minimum that the city can consider doing. The addition of these lands would add little to the cost of maintenance, since that kind of park is to be largely left almost alone.

It is widely held that Boston, with its very fine park system, sets the standard for the country. Boston's situation, too, is not dissimilar to that of Oakland—with the bay in front and hills at the back. Such, however, is the park acreage there that the population averages only 42.2 persons to the acre of park. A like proportion here would give to Oakland about 2,400 acres for parks—and the Boston parks are out of use in a popular sense five months of the year, while here there is no month when the parks would not attract. The city now has some thirty-eight and one-half acres in park, exclusive of the water sheet of the lake. This is a pitiful showing. The big park suggested would add, I suppose, a possible 640 more, leaving an enormous margin for other park reservations, of which, however, I have to recommend the taking of scarcely any, so happily situated is this tract. Thus Oakland need not be afraid of overdoing the matter in creating this park. And to refer to the West coast instead of to the East, Los Angeles, Portland and Seattle have already had the courage to do and plan much more.

PARK ACREAGE.

Let me quote, moreover, the following figures that show the park acreage possessed in 1903—since which time there has been great development—by

cities that were then of about the present size of Oakland; Memphis, 781.8 acres; Omaha, 605.8; Portland, (Ore.), 352.4; Cambridge (Mass.), 359.3. Of these Portland and Cambridge were a couple of thousand below the 100,000 mark, which I believe you are claiming for your population; while Seattle, with 92,000 population, had then 471.6 acres in parks; Hartford, Conn., with 87,000 population, had 564.3 acres; Lynn, Mass., with 72,000 population, had 1,118 acres; Des Moines, with 65,000 population, had 675 1-2 acres, and nearly all of these have made additions in the last three years. You have 38 1-2 acres.

But figures, though they have significance, are a poor way to measure parks; and the people of Oakland only have to go over these roads that I have named to feel sure that they want the park. Incidentally, they would gain, at Adams Point and on Highland avenue, for example, such lovely groves of liveoak that the city's name would have a pertinence that has not been as clear since the very early days.

Let me now quote from a park commissioner of Louisville, Ky., this expression of the purpose and value of parks:

"The use of public parks is to promote the well-being and happiness of the people, to alleviate the hard conditions of crowded humanity, to encourage out door recreations and intimacy with nature, to fill the lungs of tired workers from city factories and shops with pure and wholesome air, whenever they will or can afford to spend a day in shady groves, under spreading trees or on the jeweled meadows. They are havens of sweetness and rest for mothers and wives and sweethearts; above all, they are for the children, for all the people, high and low, rich and poor, without distinction, with equal rights and privileges for every class. A city that does not now acknowledge the necessity for public parks as a means for promoting the welfare and happiness of its people, and recognize the substantial advantages that follow the making of a city attractive and comfortable as a place of residence is not progressing, but is already on the wane."

POSSIBLE SYSTEM ADOPTED TO COUNTY.

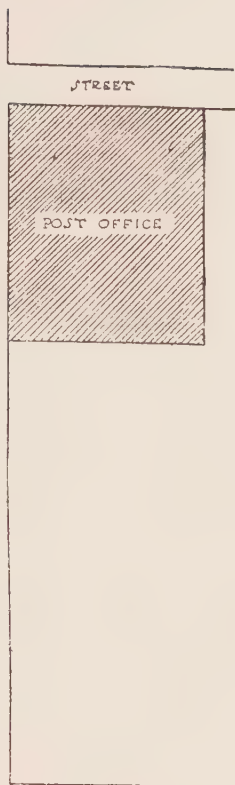
In planning this great park I have considered only the city of Oakland, with its own needs and its own financial limitations. But no one can go over these and neighboring tracts without realizing the wisdom of co-operation, in the matter of park development at least, between the several communities that make up the greater Oakland. It has been no part of my present duty to consider the development and well-being of the neighboring cities, which would certainly benefit as much as Oakland by a metropolitan system; but so great would be the gain to you through unity of effort that I would be remiss in my work if I did not call your attention to it and urge you to attempt to secure it.

Were such co-operation secured there would be no need to change in any respect the great park as I have sketched it. Topographical and social conditions would make it naturally the central feature of a county scheme, the latter mainly concerning itself hereafter with the opening of scenic drives into and along the hills, with the acquisition for the public's enjoyment of striking vantage points here and there, and with the broadening out into local parks for Berkeley and Alameda of the chain of public reservations.

For example, Moraga or Thorn road, after passing Piedmont Heights, winds on into the hills. Following a picturesque gulch, of which the high slopes are covered with a most beautiful wild growth that it will be a shame for the community to lose, Bellevue avenue is reached at last. From this there is lovely town connection, via the Claremont Country Club roads, while the drive itself be continued and made scenically splendid by extension on a viaduct over the reservoir valley to connect with the Tunnel road. So, passing the site of the new hotel, it would have direct connection with Oakland's Broadway and with Berkeley.

Although this is only one of the many possibilities of the suggested county park system, Oakland, with its other more pressing park requirements, can hardly undertake it now by itself. Unless a co-operative system can be arranged, we must close our eyes to this and similar opportunities.





IMPROVEMENT SCHEME
FOR THE
CENTER OF OAKLAND CALIFORNIA
BY
CHARLES MULFORD ROBINSON
APRIL 1906

0 25 50 75 100 150 200
SCALE

DOTTED LINES INDICATE PRESENT
STREET AND LOT LINES

STREET

COUNTY SYSTEM.

There are several examples of successful county park systems. Some of these are in the Middle West, but the one most pertinent in its similarity to conditions here is that of Essex county, New Jersey. The "metropolitan" systems, however, that have been created by the united action of over twenty cities and towns surrounding Boston; and of the city of Providence and its nearby towns and cities, also offer lessons that could be profitably studied.

Essex county, New Jersey, includes Newark, the Oranges, Montclair and other towns across the river from New York, that to a considerable extent contain the homes of men whose occupation is in New York. As is the case with the cities here, these are largely, speaking in a sociological sense, of the very best class of home-builders. Within a half dozen years a truly magnificent park system was created and practically completed, as far as public enjoyment was concerned. A city even of Newark's size could not undertake alone a work of such magnitude as has been done, especially as much of the desired land lay outside her boundaries. It is a project of all Essex county and from the first has been in the hands of the Essex County Park Commission, created by act of the state legislature. The parks, connected by parkways, range in character from little squares of green set in the midst of city streets to mountain-top stretches of almost wild land—a single one containing 2000 acres—that have secured for the cities and towns about the bay the most wonderful views.

This is the sort of park development that I must urge you to obtain in and around Oakland. But for the present we have to do with only a single city. Suffice it to say that while my scheme is thus conformed to narrower financial restrictions than it would otherwise have, it is not only a practicable municipal system, but, as far as it goes, could be properly incorporated in a county system. There would be nothing to undo.

RESERVATIONS PLANNED FOR EACH NEIGHBORHOOD.

The great park, with its approaches, for all the variety of development and

natural scenery embraced in it, the wide range of its usefulness and its convenient location, could not alone satisfy the legitimate park needs of the city of Oakland. It must be supplemented by neighborhood parks. The primary functions of these are twofold. They may be, most prominently, ornamental—beautiful in themselves and beautifying a neighborhood; or they may be most prominently recreation centers. Of the first type the city already has several examples; of the second, the playground now under construction at Independence square will be an illustration.

Considering first the ornamental spaces, the city's possessions of this sort are neither as many nor as good as they ought to be, nor on the whole have they been economically placed to get the largest result at the smallest cost. Instead of taking a city square, valuable because of the building sites, there are a number of chances in Oakland for making use of a gore, formed by the intersection of irregularly platted streets, where the narrow triangle can never have much value for building purposes, and yet where the beauty of grass and flowers and shrubs would have wide effect because at the confluence of streets. I shall especially designate two or three such sites that ought to be taken; and it will be easy to find a good many in the northern part of the city—as on the line of San Pablo avenue—where parks are now very few.

LANDSCAPE WORK POOR.

The landscape work in the present squares is generally poor, in that the walks are too broad and too laboriously sinuous. In the latter respect, the curves are not graceful, have no apparent purpose—there being none of the art that conceals art, and exasperate and even repel by taking one too much out of one's way. There is need in nearly all of these squares of screening the tool house, and in every one of them the city should construct, with proper screening a public comfort station. More use should be made of shrubs, especially in border and corner planting, and bedding plants and flowering perennials ought to be more used in this city of bloom. The squares that have been lately remod-

eled—Jefferson with its narrower walks, and Lafayette with its shrubs—present a vast esthetic improvement over the others.

In selecting the sites of these ornamental parks the city should also avail itself of opportunities to obtain well placed private land that has been notably improved. To obtain "the largest result at the smallest cost" one may approach the problem from the side of the effect as reasonably, when opportunity offers, as from that of the cost. Thus, without having the slightest idea regarding the price of the property, I would favor an effort by the city to obtain the De Fremery plot on Sixteenth street. It is located at a point where an ornamental park would well fit in with a scheme of city beautification, where it would give pleasure to a large residential population that has no other such park provision in the neighborhood, and is itself so beautiful and unusual—with its great trees and bit of wildness in the heart of the city—that were it public property the community would have in it a unique possession. I recommend that Oakland try to obtain this. Similarly, on College avenue, there is a desirable piece of private property, and the civic value of Bushrod Park can be much increased by its extension to Telegraph avenue.

PRAISES SCHOOL PLANS.

In this connection let me give a word of praise to the wisdom that has guided your course in putting so many of the fine new schools on sites that face public squares. These lend an added dignity to the building, while the building in its turn gives dignity and suitable frame to the open space. Other practical gains are the assurance thus secured of a free circulation of air, of quiet, light, and—as lately illustrated in San Francisco—of greater safety from fire. My only suggestion would be that in the remodeling necessary for some of these spaces an effort be made to develop them with relation to the abutting public structure, giving them the significance and value of a fore-court or entrance garden. If an individual owned both building and square, he would thus add to the esthetic effectiveness of

his property, and there is no reason why the city should not similarly make the most of the opportunity.

I come now to recreation spaces of which the city has much need. While the great park will be, of course, the main recreation ground for the whole community, and while their advantageous location give to lake and playground at its southern end an exceptional value. Oakland already covers too large an area to be fully served by one or two such spaces. The people—two-thirds of them little children—who most need these recreation centers are precisely the ones who do not, and cannot, for both physical and financial reasons, journey frequently at considerable distance to a park. Lake Merritt and the park between Twelfth and Eighth streets will have immense value to the population in East Oakland and in the Sixth ward which, needing facilities of the kind, will profit little by any reservation between Oak street and Second avenue. A city ordinance prohibits the playing of baseball in the street, and the boys of these neighborhoods have a right to no other place in which to work off energy.

IN EAST OAKLAND.

In East Oakland I find a most favorable site for a combined playground and water side park—the latter one of the greatest needs of Oakland—in the vacant land at the head of the harbor, west of King street and south of Dennison street. On the city maps some of this space is designated as streets, but they have not yet been put through; and the boys of the neighborhood, availing themselves of the opportunity offered by this free space, have already established there two baseball diamonds. On the Saturday morning that I happened to visit the spot, there were from seventy-five to one hundred boys and girls playing on the tract—a sufficient evidence of the need of such a space in a community that is still further and rapidly growing in population. It is the most important chance left for Oakland to get back a little of that water-front which is its right and its great natural possession, and with which it parted for a mess of pottage.

There can be easily and inexpensively

made here not only a most serviceable playground, but a really beautiful little park, commanding a view down Oakland harbor, with a pavilion at the water's edge from which shipping can be watched. The rich grass bears witness from a distance to a soil that will generously respond to landscape cultivation.

At the other end of the city, in the Sixth ward, I find a similarly good opportunity in the gore formed between Short and Division streets, at the termination of Ninth. Considering that the railroads shut off all the southern water-front, this space is almost ideally located at the end of a long arterial street where a car line runs, and with its broadest side on the bay. Of this a beautiful view is offered. Most remarkably, there is at the apex of the gore, where would be the principal entrance to the park, a double row of fine, tall poplars, that in themselves are well worth preserving. The tracks, which to this point have formed repeated barriers, now join on a narrow right of way over which—the space having been set aside for park purposes—it will be an easy matter to carry the walk by a light bridge, that will obviate danger, while the railroad's path across the park can be further shut away by eight-foot stone or concrete walls covered with vines and screened by planting. The greater part of the area is beyond, on the water-front, at a good elevation, and with only one or two houses, and those of no importance.

SPACE TOO PRECIOUS.

Midway between these two parks sites, at the water-front terminus of the business district, Broadway touches the harbor at a wharf that belongs to the city. Space here is too precious, commercially, to make practical the considering of a relinquishment of any part of it for esthetic purposes—fitting as would be the construction here of a formal water entrance to the city. But if we cannot dream of that, and must trespass on none of the wharf space, I must recommend that the city build here, over the present wharf, a second story, of which the light steel supports will take no room needed for other purposes.

This can be approached by steps leading from the Broadway sidewalks to gangways above the railroad track, so that there need be no interference to steam traffic or truckage, nor danger from them to the men and tired mothers and little children, who will find, from the outlook of this second story, a ceaseless pleasure in watching the unending panorama of the shipping and enjoy the fresh breeze. In New York these structures, put over some of the busiest wharves, are called "recreation piers," and have proved of immense value and popularity. In the case of this Broadway erection, a very little interest by the architect and a use of flags and pennants, will give to the structure a gaiety and emphasis not unsuggestive, from the water, of a city's entrance, nor unfitted for it.

FOR SIXTEENTH STREET.

The city's principal landward entrance, at the Sixteenth-street station, is one of the points early noted as demanding especial attention. The point is so important and the present conditions there are so bad that there is need to do much—to be radical—brave and generous. In considering these changes it is to be recalled that the proposed benefit to the immediate neighborhood, though considerable, is not to be compared in the broad civic view with the benefit to the whole community. It is a point where we must plan and execute not with regard to the immediate locality; but with reference to the city. For this reason I am desirous that the improvement be not confined to the station surroundings, but be carried far into town.

Beyond the station, on Wood street, and stretching from Eighteenth street to Twentieth street and back a couple of blocks, there is a tract of eleven acres that has been purchased by the city for a park. It is a most uninviting spot in its present marshy state, and is not so well located as one could wish. As it was purchased for park development and it is not easy to exchange land so secured, I suggest that its value for civic purposes be enhanced by extending it to Sixteenth street, on land that is still happily unbuilt upon. The small triangle between Sixteenth and Seventeenth streets made at the

intersection of Peralta and Center, should be included in these takings, as should the Sixteenth-street block between Campbell and Peralta. The station would then face a park area so considerable and so well placed that its esthetic development would be an easy matter, and its extension to the direct line of the town traffic would make it a striking feature in the adornment of the city.

My suggestion would be the cutting of a couple of sluices, or canals, under the tracks to the park; the placing in these of tidal gates, and then their connection in the park by means of an extended, winding lagoon. Even before this drained the marsh land the excavations from its bed would serve to fill up the low places. Generous planting would screen unsightly buildings beyond the borders of the plat.

SIMPLICITY NECESSARY.

There should be about the development an informal simplicity suited to the plain neighborhood, but even so, there would be established a charming garden-spot—fitting entrance to Oakland, and of civic worth, and giving to travelers a good impression. Sixteenth street would continue to carry the car traffic, but a carriage road should lead through the park from the station to Center street and another by way of the park to Twentieth. Between Wood street and the tracks most of the land, as I understand, belongs to the Southern Pacific Railroad; but were the city doing so much it cannot be doubted that the railroad would bear its part—as so many roads in the East have gladly done—to beautify as much of the strip as could be spared for such purpose. Ultimately this improvement would include a new and worthier station set so much nearer the street that all the tracks would be between the structure and the bay.

To Sixteenth street, as not only the main avenue between city and station but as the approach to this enlarged and developed W. Oakland park, there would be given by the city such emphasis, dignity and beauty as can be given to a street destined to carry a large volume of travel. The city has now set out palms between walk and curb on either side, and although these are not

usually the best of trees for a city street, it seems to me that here they will serve with singular effectiveness the purpose which is desired—their very unusualness and essential stateliness when grown giving to the thoroughfare a distinction that is its own. That this character may continue marked, I advise that no cross street have similar planting.

A few blocks' progress on Sixteenth street from the Center-street end of the park will bring the traveler to the De Fremery property, the acquirement of which for park purposes I have already proposed. This in itself will make further contribution to the distinction and beauty of "the way to town."

CONNECTING PARKWAY.

The De Fremery property is a bare four blocks from the suggested end of the West Oakland Park, and I would be remiss in my duty if I did not point out to you what an opportunity you have for obtaining a strikingly fine effect by the slight additional expenditure necessary to make a connecting parkway the width of Sixteenth and Seventeenth streets and the land between them. I most sincerely hope that this may be done and the parkway extended at least the two short blocks to Union. The present streets would then carry the heavy traffic, and in the intervening strip there would be given opportunity for walk and carriage-drive through park lands from Adeline street to the station. That would indeed be work worth while, and Oakland would have as it so suitably might have, a park entrance comparable to the famously beautiful one from the railroad station at Milan, in Italy.

From Adeline to Market street the improvement is likely, I fear, to be confined to Sixteenth street alone, and at Market street this "road of state" may have to stop as, it is fair to say, it can, with naturalness owing to the change in street platting. But the ideal construction would carry it on as a broad parkway to the City Hall, or civic center, at the confluence of Fourteenth street, San Pablo avenue and Broadway.

PARKWAY FROM BAY TO THE CIVIC CENTER.

This parkway from bay to civic center, it may well be argued, would soon pay for itself, not only in the increase in assessable values but also as a fire protection. The value of a wide thoroughfare as a fire check has been too recently demonstrated in San Francisco to be forgotten. Oakland, by the estuary, Lake Merritt and the Lake Merritt Park, will always be divided into east and west sections as far as fire danger is concerned. The suggested broad parkway from the center of the city to the Sixteenth-street station would further protect it by now subdividing into north and south sections the large and populous west side. Wholly apart from the immense esthetic gain, this protection is worth getting. As to the treatment of the parkway, the added strip would give space for separate provisions for cars and for heavy teaming (on the lines of the present Sixteenth and Seventeenth streets) and between for light carriage and pedestrian travel, and for ornamental planting. It would be a beautiful feature as well as, in time of need, an invaluable protection.

Extending from Sixteenth to Seventeenth streets, its width from San Pablo avenue to Grove street would be 300 feet, from Grove to Market street 350 feet, and then, thus continued it is only five short blocks to the De Fremery property, and thence it goes on, by the proposed park and parkway, to the water. Its one terminus would be at West Oakland Park; its other, with fine effect, at the civic center. At the latter point a formal entrance should be given to it by the erection of pillars, or of pylons, at the Clay-street corners, while the small triangular-shaped plat between Clay street and San Pablo avenue, Sixteenth and Seventeenth, would of course be bought and thrown into the approach. This would have also further esthetic value in connection with the new site to be proposed for the City Hall.

CIVIC CENTER IS IMPORTANT.

Than the civic center no point can be more important. And if the value of land here is such as to make the cost of any changes relatively great it is to

be remembered that with delay this cost can only grow, and that at no other point can slight changes in street lines give anything like a proportionate effect. There are few cities in this country that have a civic center so clearly marked as Oakland's and one of which the permanence of location is so assured. There is no danger that what is done here, if done wisely, will be effort wasted. It is a point at which a great deal of money might be expended in the working out of a very stunning and splendid scheme; but I shall point out only the immediately necessary or advisable and shall make it as simple as is consistent with the obligation inspiringly imposed at such a point. There, too, the suggested park way to the bay would give an air of splendor.

So familiar to all the residents of Oakland are the streets and buildings at this civic center that there is no occasion to rehearse here the present conditions. The immediate utilitarian wants are a new City Hall, and perhaps a second building for police headquarters, and the relief of the growing congestion of traffic at the point where the long streets meet. The latter can be best secured at such a point not as most persons unreflectingly suppose, by a mere widening of space but by a provision—usually at no greater expense—of such convenient short-cuts as to distribute and facilitate the movement of the converging traffic.

FOR SHORT-CUT.

The accompanying diagram puts before you, conveniently and at once, the plan I have worked out. Its advantages are as follows: The new street offers a short-cut between the postoffice and the City Hall, and from the postoffice to San Pablo ave. and to Washington street; also from Broadway and Telegraph avenue to San Pablo and to Washington street. The plan further opens Washington street to San Pablo avenue and gives direct street car connection between them. It provides a Police Court and jail site and yet gives to the jail no conspicuousness. It affords an imposing site for the City Hall, brings the postoffice into the official scheme, and opens a fine view

of it. It offers a new accent for the extended Washington street. It furnishes appropriate sites for embellishment with civic sculpture, fountains, etc., and sites where new public buildings, as the need for them arises, can be located to the enhancement of the scheme's effectiveness. It provides an isle of safety for car passengers at Telegraph avenue and Broadway, and in front of the new City Hall. It requires the purchase of no property now expensively improved, and at remarkably little net cost makes possible a comprehensive scheme that is handsome, convenient and appropriate.

The diagram fully illustrates the plan. In a few words, it involves the opening of a short, curving street, seventy-five wide, of which the Postoffice shall close the vista at one end and the new City Hall at the other; and then the purchase of the triangular plat at the corner of San Pablo avenue and Fifteenth street, with enough land back of it for a City Hall site. The placing of the new police court and jail and the extension of Washington street are effected on land which the city already owns. A striking location for civic sculpture is offered at the Seventeenth-street end of the triangle in front of the Postoffice, between Telegraph avenue and is the place for an "isle of safety," with, at its apex, the fountain which I understand that the Women's Civic Club is already planning to put in the immediate vicinity. In front of the City Hall there is a site for a flagstaff with ornamental pedestal, the whole offering an accent to the new street and to Washington street until civic sculpture shall some day more adequately occupy the important site. The City Hall, facing obliquely down the open space, on an axis parallel with San Pablo avenue, would be in clear view from Broadway and Fourteenth street, and a tower at the east corner, on the axis of the new street and in full view from Broadway and Fourteenth, would give it fine effect. On the new street there would be opportunity for those curving facades that are so interesting an architectural feature in Europe—as on Regent street in London—and the curve would make possible, as a diagonal street would not, a direct view of the Postoffice facade.

OBTAINING LAND.

Of the negotiations through which the new street may be opened I need not speak; but in the diagram I have suggested how economically much of the land might be obtained by exchanges. That the new street and the carrying out of the scheme would very greatly enhance the value of all the abutting property is perfectly clear. In this way it shortly would pay for itself, as I do not think that the various other plans that have been suggested would; and instead of a thoroughly commonplace development, the city would have something original and imposing. And yet in the making of the plans there has been avoided the utilization of any property now expensively improved. I hope that Oakland will have the confidence, courage, and imaginative foresight to take up this work. The city has got to do something here, and I believe this plan will give the most return for the outlay.

From Harrison boulevard it is only a short distance by good existing streets to the Civic Center, and thence, via the new street, to the parkway to the bay.

VARIOUS NEEDS OF OAKLAND.

With the discussion of the Civic Center, of the Sixteenth-street entrance and of various park requirements, the problems of Oakland, as they originally grouped themselves, have been considered, and a really splendid city has been mapped out. Some matters remain, of which I wish to speak before closing my report.

Let me point out first the appropriateness and civic effectiveness of Broadway's further improvement. From Fourteenth street to the water-front it must remain the leading business thoroughfare, and as such the city may well expend upon it especial care. The burial of the wires, now happily in progress, the abolition of the poles, the regulation of advertising on and over the sidewalks, and a handsome system of street lighting would in combination do much to give dignity to the street. These and similar improvements should not, however, stop at Fourteenth street; but, with the exception of the Civic Center plans, should be carried out to Seventeenth. Here facing down the street, when the narrow triangle in front of the Postoffice has been cleared, is an admir-

able site for another public, or semi-public, building. So the improved Broadway would make connection from the water entrance through the Judiciary to the Civic Center, while itself serving as a main thoroughfare.

Washington street, because of its commercial importance and similar connections, may have like care.

The steam railroad's grade crossings here, and all through the city, form one of Oakland's most grievous misfortunes; but such is the growing use of electricity on steam roads which thus serve cities that it seems not unreasonable to hope that on these tracks steam will soon make way for electric traction.

FOURTEENTH AVENUE.

Of Commerce street, or Fourteenth avenue, which is a newly developed street and the broadest thoroughfare on the east side, I promised to speak in discussing Dimond canyon road. As a direct outlet of this, which otherwise would terminate far from the populous section of the city, and through it the outlet of the whole park system on this side, the handsome development of Commerce street, is an important factor in the systematic beautification of Oakland. From Eighteenth street outward the car tracks for the greater portion of the distance are at the sides, on a private right of way. At first, after they go to the side, they are beyond the curb; but further on there appears to be an effort to make the street seem so wide as to include them. My advice is that this effort be abandoned; that the curb be continued between the road and the tracks, and at such space from them that in the intervening strip it shall be possible to put some planting which will partially screen the railroad right of way, deaden the noise of the cars, make a shield from their dust, and incidentally beautify the street.

This is a style of treatment that is being more and more adopted for important streets of this character to which it is desirable to give at least the semblance of a boulevard. Even the presence of the car barns at Twenty-first street need not preclude the possibility of continuing such attractive treatment. At Eighteenth street the tracks turn off, and immediately begin in the center of the street those very narrow lots that mark

the gradual drawing away of Fifteenth avenue.

For some distance they are practically valueless to private owners, but worth much to the street, with their power to make or mar it, and as far as such conditions extend the city should acquire them. In the breadth thus obtained there should be developed a system of center parking that will carry on the boulevard aspect of the street and make it a fitting entrance to the park system.

For the local improvement clubs of Oakland there is much to do in working for the carrying out of the suggestions which are herein contained that seem to them good. I hope they will do this with great energy and co-operation. But there also await them certain other opportunities for a service that will leave its stamp upon the city.

Throughout the municipality there are many large open spaces, formed by the intersection of irregularly plotted streets where a large circle of triangle filled with flowers, or planted with a palm, or with low, flowering shrubs, would relieve the dreary waste of street space and would make an attractive object in the perspective, doing much more than merely adorning the immediate spot that they would beautify. Examples of such places are at the junction of Perry avenue and Van Buren street, at Perry and Chetwood, or at Lee and Vernon—to name at random a few, in a neighborhood where such improvement would be particularly appropriate and where the residents would gain a satisfaction all out of proportion to the small cost that would represent each lot-owner's share.

At the end of Vernon street there is a small lot, on which when I saw it, there was a for sale sign. It commanded a lovely view of the hills and of Pleasant valley, and was a type of such places as I would like to see the residents of a neighborhood club together to buy, that it might be held for the common good as an outlook. What an attractive little park resting-place this would make, and how the residents of the neighborhood would use it. It is such places as that which endear a city to those who live in it, adding vastly to their enjoyments. To the community at large it would be worth little, but to the immediate lo-

cality much; and all around are well-to-do people who in union could buy it easily and present it to the city.

It may be objected that the purchase of such a space and the adorning of wide areas at irregular street intersections is work for the municipality. But can we do too much for the city that we love? And concerning the matter practically, there is too much else for Oakland to do just now to make it likely that she will also undertake this purely adornment work. The benefit is mainly local, and if the people want it they must do it themselves. It is far better for an improvement club to do practical, concrete things than simply to criticise and to beg. It is better, I mean, for its own healthfulness. And once such a plat is obtained, or a space at a street intersection is made beautiful, it is probable that the city will be willing enough to maintain it.

In Los Angeles last year 483,000 bedding plants were put out by the city park department in the parks and on the streets. This is one of the respects in which Oakland is weak, as concerns civic beauty. Yet I do not know why it should not make almost as brave a showing as Los Angeles. But with the city's more pressing needs the people will have to begin the work.

I have spoken of the burial of the wires. This should continue as fast as practicable; and when the wires cannot go under ground the city should compel a co-operation of the poles.

In the matter of curbs Oakland is not up to date. The provision of these should no more rest with the property-owners than should the paving of the street or the laying of the sewer in front of his premises. The city should do the work and assess the cost as part of the street improvement. Absolute uniformity in material and line, permanence and neatness, are the ends desired. The wooden curbs must go, stone and concrete being substituted for them.

On residential streets the city should establish a building line, between which and the street no structure shall project. This not only makes for the beauty of the way, but for the protection of every householder—of every home, rented or owned.

The street trees also are much in need of attention. They ought to be

put in charge of a distinct bureau of the municipal government. A competent city forester would secure the planting of the right kind of trees, their planting in the right way, their proper care—this including on the one hand their scientific trimming, and on the other their protection from the butchery of linemen, and the use of single varieties, on single streets, i. e., the uniformity that is so desirable esthetically in the planting of streets trees. Certainly all these results, especially when the marked effect of trees on a city's appearance is considered, are worth securing at so little cost as the pay of a competent forester and his assistants. Some of the proposed park sites might be properly used as a municipal tree nursery, so making the administration of the office economical. Incidentally, it may be added street trees are no inconsiderable fire protection.

With one more suggestion I shall have done with criticism and recommendations. Oakland ought at once to take whatever steps are necessary to secure a park commission. A park, however small, is, or ought to be, a work of art. It is not to be classed with the prosaic forms of creative public work, or with street-cleaning. The creating and care of parks is properly a department by itself, demanding a special taste and fitness and a deal of time. If parks are worth establishing at all, they are worth taking care of and making beautiful, and it were absurd for the city to contemplate a large investment in park lands if it is not prepared to secure their ultimate proper development and care.

BILL BOARDS AGGRESSIVE.

The bill boards of Oakland are more than usually aggressive. Such structures as that on East Twelfth street overlooking the lake, where the municipality is spending a considerable sum for the cause of beauty, are something more than an affront and offense. They are a reproach to the city itself. Ordinances should so limit the height of bill boards on the grounds of public safety—since they are a menace in wind or fire—as to prohibit the erection of the 'double-decker.' Neither, on grounds of safety and morality, should the city law allow them to be boarded to the ground. It should be possible to

see under them. Finally, in New York, Massachusetts and Illinois, and very likely in some other states, laws have been enacted prohibiting the erection of large signs within 100 feet of a park, it being held that the park confers on the adjacent property a benefit at least sufficient to compensate for any loss inflicted by this restriction.

In the course of this long report I have wasted no words on flattery and compliments. But the very length of the report, and earnestness with which I beg you to avail yourselves of the opportunities before you, should be proof of my high regard for Oakland, of my

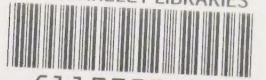
faith in it, of my confidence in the possibility of its very beautiful development by steps that are perfectly practicable and simple. This is a critical time in Oakland's history. It is to choose its destiny. Shall it be beautiful as well as large and busy; or shall it with its growing size, become commonplace and at last ugly? You remember the statement, "A city that does not now acknowledge the necessity for public parks, * * is already on the wane," and Ruskin says: "You may have thought that beauty was expensive. You are wrong. It is ugliness that costs."

Very respectfully,

CHARLES MULFORD ROBINSON.



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